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"Dreams of Destiny and Omens of Greatness: Exceptionalism in Ottoman Political and Historical Thought" **[Accepted for publication in the *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 09/2018]**

In the late seventeenth century, the court astrologer Müneccimbaşı Aḥmed Dede b. Luṭfullah (d. 1702) began the last section of his Arabic universal history with an excursus on the greatness of the Ottoman dynasty. "Let it be known that the rulers of this dynasty (God by His aid perpetuate them) are the greatest of the world's rulers in majesty," he wrote. "Greater in wealth and land, higher in rank, more munificent, more powerful, more martial, richer in coin, men, and arms, wiser and more judicious. . ." The Ottomans excelled all others in quite literally every respect:

> God has blessed them with rule like none since the Prophet Solomon. It is clear to students of royal history that they did not betray any king before them in taking power, as did most of their predecessors. . .but seized the whole of their realm by the sword from infidels and rebels, according to the best model of the righteous forebears who were companions or followers of the Prophet.[1]

Due to these virtues, Müneccimbaşı said, God rewarded the Ottomans with an empire that would last until the end of time. He then listed eight specific signs that foretold the line and its rule.

This article uses these signs and others—dreams, portents, prognostications—as an entry

1 Müneccimbaşı, *Jāmi' al-duwal*, ed. Ahmet Ağırakça (Istanbul, 1995), 5-9. Source translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Cf. the Turkish translation by Nedīm, *Ṣaḥā'īfü'l-Ahbār fī Veḳāyi'i'l-Āsār* (Istanbul, 1868), 3: 265 ff. See also Hatice Arslan-Sözüdoğru, *Müneccimbaşı als Historiker: arabische Historiographie bei einem osmanischen Universalgelehrten des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2009).

point into Ottoman political and historical thought. Namely, Müneccimbaşı offers us a glimpse of what some scholars have recently called "Ottoman exceptionalism," a complex of ideas about the empire's supposed uniqueness and superiority.[2] Drawing on sources in Turkish and Arabic, I trace how Ottoman ruling élites from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries imagined their empire and its historical meaning, with most arguing that the dynasty stood at the telos of human history and only a minority voicing doubt. I begin with the "seeds" of the topic in the empire's early centuries and myths of origin, including a number of dream stories, leading to full-scale exceptionalism by the sixteenth century. Looking closer, I then identify an eschatological strand in the lead-up to the Islamic millennium that centered on the dynasty's role in the end of time. The millennium's uneventful passing led to the dissolution of this strand but not of ideas about exceptionalism itself, which in later forms turned inward, depicting the empire as "eternal" and projecting its rule to an undetermined future period. What follows, then, is a preliminary sketch. It does not deal with the actual past as much as with how Ottoman élites interpreted the empire in

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2 See Gottfried Hagen, "Afterword," in Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: the World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden, 2004), 233 ff; and Hagen and Menchinger, "Ottoman Historical Thought," in *A Companion to Global Historical Thought*, ed. Prasenjit Duara et al (Cambridge, 2014), 100-01. I also use the concept for the eighteenth century in my book, *The First of the Modern Ottomans: the Intellectual History of Ahmed Vāsıf* (Cambridge, 2017). Hüseyin Yılmaz adopts the term in his recent work, too, as one aspect of an ambitious effort to show the mystification of rulership in early Ottoman political thought: *Caliphate Redefined: the Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton, 2018). While Yılmaz's book appeared after this article was substantially written, I have tried to incorporate it where appropriate.

its origins, character, and mission, and with the signs that they read backward as proof of its exceptional future—Ottoman dreams of destiny and omens of greatness.

Seeds of Exceptionalism

First, what exactly do I mean by "exceptionalism"? I use this term not as an external scholarly valuation but as an internal one that grew and matured among the Ottomans themselves. Empires as a rule have universal pretensions. They claim a privileged mission or special role in history that serves to justify, but also to explain, their existence, expansion, and dominion. They are the exceptions that make the rule. It may even be possible to say that a sense of political or historical exception underwrites the idea of empire itself, from Rome's undivided *imperium sine fine* to the cosmological claims of the Chinese Son of Heaven or the Thousand Year Reich. One does not just find naked power in empires. Instead, sophisticated ideologies or narratives may hark back to a mythic past, couple rule with divine favor, and seek to insulate a chosen people from normal temporal patterns.[3] Like the Romans, Byzantines, and ancient Chinese, the Ottomans too had universal pretensions around which they constructed an ideology, a sense of mission and destiny that laid at the core of the empire's expansive claims. It is this, a mixture of political, theological, and historical beliefs about the empire's meaning and special role in the world, that I refer to as "Ottoman exceptionalism."[4]

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3 See Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, eds., *Universal Empire: a Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, 2012).

4 I use "empire" as an analytical category and with some reservation. As Einar Wigen points out, the Ottomans had no concept of empire of their own—no single concept bridging state,

One way of viewing "exceptionalism" is as a sort of ideology. Ideologies are broad sets of belief that articulate a vision for the world, perhaps in an ideal order or historical telos, in "overlapping spheres of religious belief and ritual, of power negotiations and relations, of self-definition and self-representation, or human understanding of 'world order.'"[5] They might include foundation myths, for instance—stories of origin that claim to be historical but really act to explain an empire's existence, rise, and success, often by divine means—but express much more. Nor are ideologies just window dressing to justify a political project. They can also form a stimulus in their own right, informing action, decision-making, and political organization.[6]

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subjects, and territory—until the 19th century, when it emerged through entanglement with European and especially French discourse: "Ottoman Concepts of Empire," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8 (2013): 44-66. However, I assume that the Ottoman polity fits an imperial type, "a heterogeneous aggregate of peoples and kingdoms which came to form a whole only after a dynastic rule brought them under its sceptre," and is therefore open to comparison. On the latter point, see Marc Aymes, "Many Standards at a Time: the Ottomans' Leverage with Imperial Studies," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8 (2013): 31; and Alan Mikhail and Christine Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54 (2012): 721-45.

5 Susan Alcock and Kathleen Morrison, "Imperial Ideologies," in ed. Susan Alcock et al, *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (Cambridge, 2001), 279-80.

6 See Rudi Lindner on the question of ideas as motive force or justification for past events in "Stimulus and Justification in Early Ottoman History," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27 (1982): esp. 211.

We might equally see exceptionalism as what Imad Mansour calls a "dominant societal narrative." This is a "coherent and stabilized ideational structure" that fuses various ideas to form a story about a state or group's place in the world and history, including the group's ideas about itself, its past, present, and future, and its relations with other groups. Mansour argues that all societies develop such stories. A narrative becomes dominant when it is broadly disseminated, legitimated, and accepted, which then sets parameters for political action. Decision-makers do not simply manipulate the narrative, as they themselves are socialized into it and either adopt or fall under its influence. While such narratives can change and adapt, says Mansour, they usually contain core ideas that cannot easily alter without undermining the coherence of the whole. They thus tend to be stable over long periods.[7] Ottoman exceptionalism fits well with Mansour's definition of a dominant narrative, if not for Ottoman society at large then at least for the empire's ruling élite. Whether ideology or narrative, however, I do not think that we can simply dismiss exceptionalist expressions in our sources as rhetoric or bombast. The frequency of these claims, spanning countless works in a period of over three hundred years, indicates that the core ideas remained quite stable and resonated deeply with Ottoman writers and readers.

Ottoman myths of origin can serve as a starting point for this examination. The so-called "dynastic myth" is well-known to historians. As treated by Colin Imber, the Ottomans, who arose in northwest Anatolia in the late thirteenth century, identified by the fifteenth century at least as warriors for the faith (*ghāzī*) in frontier raids against neighboring Christians. The Ottomans merged their Inner Asian roots, as well as Turco-Mongol notions of world domination, with the

7 See Imad Mansour, *Statecraft in the Middle East: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Security* (London, 2016), esp. 3-14.

juristic formulations of jihad in Sunni Islam. Drawing on an older, presumably living tradition, our earliest sources depict a fluid march society with the dynasty and its followers as divinely-favored leaders in the struggle for Islam. Fabricated genealogies typically traced the line to Japheth, son of the prophet Noah, through Oğuz Khan, a mythic Turkic forebear, in order to show the dynasty's superior descent and unbroken links to monotheism. Some accounts also asserted that the Ottomans inherited their power and lands through a direct *translatio imperii* from the Seljuk sultans of Rūm. The "dynastic myth" thus provided a basis for Ottoman claims against other Anatolian rivals, "marrying" Turkish genealogy to Islamic cosmogony, and Inner Asian notions of empire to the ghāzī ethos.[8]

These foundation myths, of course, are far from coherent. They are often contradictory and reflect a retrospective effort to legitimize Ottoman dynastic claims as well as to make sense

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8 Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth," *Turcica* 19 (1987): 7-27. Osman Turan's works are pervaded by nationalism and use the same myths to argue for Turkish exceptionalism: "The Ideal of World Domination Among the Medieval Turks," *Studia Islamica* 4 (1955): 77-90; and idem, *Türk Cihān Hākimiyeti Mekfūresi Tarihi* (Istanbul, 1969), 2 vols. Scholars in past decades have challenged Paul Wittek's influential "ghāzī thesis" of Ottoman origins. Rudi Lindner and Heath Lowry envision a tribal or predatory confederation, respectively, with ghāzī rhetoric as a later projection onto the past. See, for example, Lindner's *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington, 1983) and *Explorations in Ottoman Prehistory* (Ann Arbor, 2007), and Lowry's *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany, NY, 2003). Cemal Kafadar's *Between Two Worlds: the Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, 1995) seeks to preserve the ghāzī thesis in a more nuanced form.

of the line's rather surprising success. The empire's eponymous founder, 'Osmān, son of Erṭuğrul, had an undistinguished background in the old Byzantine province of Bithynia. The line had neither pedigree nor a firm claim to power. They also emerged during a time of intense political fluidity. As recent scholarship shows, the post-Mongol period was one of transformation, novelty, and heated struggles for political legitimation not only in Anatolia but across the whole of western Eurasia. The Ottoman line was only one of many—Ilkhanid, Timurid, Aqquyunlu, and others—to experiment with new titles, new political forms, and new claims to royal or even sacral authority.[9] It only makes sense for us to place Ottoman myths of origin in this wider Islamic world. The "dynastic myth" helped to supply their deficiencies and legitimate the line in a highly competitive political arena. Yet how did these ideas evolve toward exceptionalism?

Our earliest surviving sources from the fifteenth century already contain seeds of exceptionalism. One key element in the germination of these seeds was the dynasty's supposed divine favor. Ghāzīs were said to enjoy God's support; they were tools to work His will on earth. In a narrative from the so-called "Anonymous Chronicles," for example, a compilation of works redacted quite early, we see God help a "naked dervish" cut his drunken enemies to pieces with a

9 See, for example, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religio-Political Legitimacy," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam* (Malden, MA, 2018); İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, 2016), esp. 251-86; and Jonathan Brack, "Mediating Sacred Kingship: Conversion and Sovereignty in Mongol Iran" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2016). Yılmaz corroborates these trends in the Ottoman lands.

wooden sword and conquer a district single-handed.[10] As the chronicler puts it elsewhere,

The ghāzī is the instrument of the true faith,

His lot will no doubt be good.

The ghāzī is God's servant, who sweeps

This earth of the filth of unbelief.

The ghāzī is God's sword, surely

The ghāzī is the refuge of believers.

Whoso dies a martyr for God's sake,

Think him not dead, for that happy one lives![11]

Early sources also claim that the Ottoman line by extension, as ghāzī leaders, enjoyed God's special blessing. The *İskendernāme* (*The Book of Alexander*) of Aḥmedī (d. 1412/13), one of the first works to treat the Ottomans, contains praise generally for holy raiders as well as specifically for the dynasty. "Do not ask why the holy raiders are mentioned last," Aḥmedī says, in the work's final section. "Do not ask why they appeared at the end. What comes later is better than what comes earlier. Those who think will understand what I say."[12] The same work later

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10 Friedrich Giese, ed., *Die altosmanischen anonymen Chroniken* (Breslau, 1922), 1: 11. See also Imber, 11; and Victor Ménage, "On the Recensions of Uruj's 'History of the Ottomans,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30 (1967): 314-22.

11 Giese, *Anonymen Chroniken*, 1: 2.

12 Aḥmedī, *History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raids Against the Infidels*, ed. and trans. Kemal Silay (Harvard, 2004), (trans.) 2, (text) 26. Aḥmedī treated the Ottomans in the final section of the *İskendernāme*, a universal history in verse. The earliest

singles out the Ottomans explicitly as God's favorites:

> By these words have I explained it to you,
>
> The case of the Ottomans is well-known.
>
> Because the House of 'Osmān was truly sincere,
>
> They found a special status with God.
>
> Wherever they went, they found the way.
>
> They seized realms and prevailed over peoples.
>
> Had there been any defect in their sincerity,
>
> Then harm would have once befallen their affairs.[13]

To Mehmed Neşrī (d. 1520?), meanwhile, writing in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the Ottomans were the finest warriors since early Islam and second only to the Prophet and his immediate successors. Neşrī dedicated the last section of his universal history, *Cihānnümā* (*Cosmorama*), to the Ottoman line with these words:

> This chapter is on the best of ghāzīs and warriors for the faith after the Prophet of God (Peace be upon him!) and the Rightly-Guided caliphs. While they come last in time and place, they are first in rank and power. Last may rank first, just as His Grace the Prophet Muḥammad is the seal of prophets and chief of apostles.[14]

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manuscript dates to AD 1416.

13 Ibid, (trans.) 17, (text) 42. I have slightly amended Silay's translation.

14 Franz Taeschner, ed., *Ğihānnümā: die altosmanische Chronik des Mevlānā Mehemmed Neschrī* (Leipzig, 1951), 1: 18-19. On the chronicle itself, see Ménage, *Neshri's History of the Ottomans: the Sources and Development of the Text* (London, 1964).

It is worth noting that these early sources establish a motif that reappeared often in later centuries: namely, that ʻOsmān and his line had won God's blessings as a reward for their superior sincerity, piety, and faith. This argument—one based on merit—is quite different from claims to universal or sacral kingship in other post-Mongol polities. In the Mongol political tradition, the mandate to rule did not derive from merit but from divine charisma (*qut* or *su*) given by Eternal Heaven to Chinggis Khan and passed down through his offspring, along with universal sovereignty.[15] While not all Ottoman authors took a strictly meritocratic line, some citing descent from Turkic forebears and other reasons for the dynasty's blessing, many seem to have at least implicitly rejected the Chinggisid idea of charisma from an early stage.

Dreams of Destiny and Spiritual Favor

The first three signs of Ottoman greatness that Müneccimbaşı offers in his work are dreams taken from the earliest chronicle traditions. Ottoman chronicles dating back to the fifteenth century contain several dream narratives that, taken together, not only assert the dynasty's divine favor but also foretell its future greatness. The most famous of these is "'Osmān's dream." ʻĀşıḳpaşazāde (d. after 1484) recorded the most widely cited version of this dream in his *Tevārīh-i Āl-ı ʻOsmān* (*Annals of the House of ʻOsmān*), written around 1484 and based in part on older material from one Yahşī Faḳīh. As he tells it, ʻOsmān often visited a dervish named Edebālī. One night, while staying at Edebālī's home, ʻOsmān had a strange dream:

> He dreamt that a moon rose from this holy man's breast and came and entered his, ʻOsmān Ghāzī's, breast. When this moon entered ʻOsmān's breast, a tree began to grow

15 Brack, "Sacred Kingship," esp. 3-4.

> from his navel whose shadow covered the whole world. In its shade there were mountains; and streams sprang from the foot of these mountains. People were drinking from these streams, and others watering gardens, and others causing fountains to flow.

‘Osmān awoke. When he spoke to Edebālī, the holy man interpreted his dream: “‘Osmān, my son, congratulations! Rule has been given to you and your line.” Edebālī then gave ‘Osmān his daughter in marriage.[16]

Müneccimbaşı and other sources relate two lesser-known dreams, as well, both featuring ‘Osmān’s father Erṭuğrul. In one, Erṭuğrul one night entered the house of an unnamed holy man. This holy man warned him to move, for he had turned his back on a venerable book, the Quran. Erṭuğrul then stood in prayer and respect before the Quran all night. When he at last fell asleep, he dreamt that “someone from God” visited him and said, “You have shown great reverence for our words. You did not leave them behind you. We shall now raise you, your offspring, and their children.”[17]

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16 Friedrich Giese, ed., *Die altosmanische Chronik des ‘Ašikpašazāde* (Leipzig, 1929), 9-10. Cf. Müneccimbaşı, 7. This story appears or is referenced in many other sources, with alterations, such as the Anonymous Chronicles and the work of al-Bayātī (fl. ca. 1481), Neşrī, Oruç (d. after 1503), Ḳaraçelebizāde (d. 1658), Ṣolāḳzāde (d. 1658), and Ferā’iżīzāde (d. 1835). It is also retold in an early seventeenth-century work on the virtues and superiority of the Ottoman dynasty, a sort of compendium of exceptionalism: Mar‘ī b. Yusūf al-Karmī, *Qalā’id al-‘iqyān fī faḍā’il mulūk āl ‘Uthmān*, Princeton Firestone Library, Islamic MSS Garrett nr. 1338Y, fols. 15b-16b. This manuscript is a Turkish translation completed in 1704 by Ṣa‘bān Ṣifā’ī.

17 The original Arabic was not available to me. See Ḳaramānī Meḥmed Paşa, *Risāla fī tawārīkh*

In the third and final dream, Erṭuğrul, who as yet had no children, prayed continually for a son and married a "pious lady." Then, "one night [he] dreamed a dream."

> In the morning he rode to Konya, and told his dream to a vizier of Sultan ʻAlāeddīn named ʻAbdulʻazīz, who was a great astrologer. He said, "In my dream a spring flowed from my hearth and covered the world like a sea." ʻAbdulʻazīz consulted his astrolabe and his books and said, "God will give you a son, whose descendants will rule the world."

Erṭuğrul then praised God and returned home, where a son named ʻOsmān was soon born to him.[18]

These three dream stories share key elements, most obviously in the coupling of divine favor with political rule. They also link the Ottomans to figures with special spiritual or mystical powers. Erṭuğrul and ʻOsmān relied on men with esoteric knowledge—Sheikh Edebālī, ʻAbdulʻazīz, and the unnamed holy man—to interpret their dreams and discover their good fortune. Such spiritual supermen serve to underline God's partiality for the dynasty. Al-Bayātī,

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al-salāṭīn al-ʻUthmāniyya, trans. in Atsız, *Osmanlı Tarihleri* (Istanbul, 1949), 1: 343-44. Cf. Müneccimbaşı, 7, who adds "with a great dynasty that will last until Judgment Day (bi-dawla jalīla dā'ima ilā yawm al-qiyāma)." The dream is repeated in various forms in the chronicles of Rūḥī (d. 1522), Muṣṭafā ʻĀlī (d. 1600), Ṣolāḳzāde, and al-Karmī (fols. 13a-14b). Mükrimin Halil Yinanç also translates the work in "Millī Tarihimize Dair Eski Bir Vesika," *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası* II/79: 85-94; III/80: 142-55.

18 Victor Ménage's translation from Aya Sofya MS 2705, in "The Recensions of Uruj," 317-18. Cf. Müneccimbaşı, 7. A version of the dream also appears in the chronicle of Muṣṭafā ʻĀlī.

for example, who wrote a genealogy of the line for Prince Cem Sulṭān (d. 1495), in this way writes that Edebālī interpreted not one but many dreams for ‘Osmān, the issues of which were favorable and “spread the world over.”[19]

This brings us to three more of Müneccimbaşı’s signs, all of which further stress the Ottomans’ spiritual favor. In many sources, chronicles as well as genealogies and hagiographies, the dynasty not only enjoys proximity to such holy men but also actively receives their blessings. Müneccimbaşı draws on the *Hasht-Bahisht* (*The Eight Paradises*) of İdrīs-i Bidlīsī (d. 1520) for one example. He relates how the Prophet Hıżır or perhaps another saint visited a righteous man named Ḳūmrāl Abdāl, who at times fought against the infidel on the Anatolian frontier with other dervishes, telling him, “Go to ‘Osmān Ghāzī and give him the good news, that God has bestowed on him and his line a great empire that shall last till Judgment Day!” As Ḳūmrāl Abdāl did not know ‘Osmān, the holy man provided certain signs by which to recognize him.[20]

We encounter the dynasty in Ottoman-era hagiographies, too, including those of Anatolia’s spiritual giants. Müneccimbaşı linked the dynasty in one of his signs to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), the famed mystic poet and patron of the Mevlevī dervish order. Erṭuğrul visited this saint whenever he was in Konya, he writes. Once, Erṭuğrul brought his young son ‘Osmān to

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19 al-Bayātī, *Cām-ı Cem-Ayīn*, in Atsız, 1: 395. See also Brack’s recent article on Edebālī, “Was Ede Bali a Wafā’ī Shaykh? Sufis, Sayyids, and Genealogical Creativity in the Early Ottoman World,” in *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia*, eds. A.C.S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız (Würzburg, 2016), 333-60.

20 Müneccimbaşı, 8. Cf. Nedīm, 3: 266-26; and *Heşt Bihişt*, ed. Mehmet Karataş et al (Ankara, n.d.), 1: 109-10.

ask for Rūmī's blessing shortly after the saint had heard that the Seljuk sultan, his own spiritual child, had taken a new master. "If the sultan has found himself a father," Rūmī said, "then I have found myself a son." Rūmī then blessed 'Osmān and told him he would found a great empire, which his line would rule so long as they venerated the saint's order.[21] This story shows a later Ottoman reading of the fourteenth-century hagiography *Manāqib al-'ārifīn* (*Feats of the Knowers of God*) of Aflākī (d. 1380), where the sultan favored a popular sheikh named Bābā-ye Marandī. Insulted, Rūmī stormed off with the vow, "If the sultan has made him his father, I will take a new son!"[22]

Sources similarly connected the dynasty to Ḥācı Bektāş Velī (d. 1271), the eponymous founder of the Bektāşī dervish order. According to his vita, Erṭuğrul and 'Osmān both visited the saint and gained his blessings, as well as a vow that they would enjoy worldly power. Ḥācı Bektāş crowned 'Osmān with the order's felt cap and girded him with his own belt. "We have turned you loose on the enemies of the faith," he told 'Osmān:

> The infidels who see our cap on your head shall be unable to stand against your sword. Their swords shall not harm you. You will prevail wherever you go and no one shall get the better of you or your line. I have given you my name Hünkār [i.e. "sovereign"]; may your line be known by that name. . . As for me, I have been reserving you and your line's souls for seven years for rulership. You have come, you see, and taken your lot. Now go

21 Müneccimbaşı, 8.

22 Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad-e Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God: Manāqeb al-'ārifīn*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden, 2002), 102-03.

to the sultan's men and tell our son Sultan ʻAlāeddīn to give this one a lofty place.[23]

Later Ottomans likely read these stories in different ways. The followers of certain holy men or mystical orders could see in them a special link to the dynasty, for instance, and thus a superiority over their spiritual rivals. This may be the case for disciples of the Qādirī dervish Eşrefoğlu Rūmī (d. 1469/70?), whose vita claims that he once healed Meḥmed II's mother of a tongue ailment. Eşrefoğlu was then forced to rebuff the sultan, who, we are told, wanted to become his devotee and give up the throne.[24] Likewise, though, the stories helped to associate the dynasty with the holy aura of particularly venerated sheikhs—and therefore with the divine. Indeed, we read that the spiritual favor of the dynasty was so great that even non-Muslim holy men recognized it. As another sign of Ottoman greatness, Müneccimbaşı reports from the *Oğuznāme* (*Book of the Oğuz*) of Yazıcızāde ʻAlī (fl. early 15th c.) that Christian monks of Saint John Prodromos (Margarites) in Rumelia, near the town of Serres, predicted the empire's rise and conquests through astrology. The monks then astutely traveled to Anatolia to give ʻOsmān gifts, exchanging their loyalty for his divinely vouchsafed protection.[25]

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23 Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, ed., *Manakıb-ı Hacı Bektāş-ı Velī: Vilāyet-nāme* (Istanbul, 1958), 74-77. Cf. Yılmaz, 142-43. This story perhaps represents a plea for patronage from the Bektāşī order. Still, I think it likely, as in the above case of Aflākī, that Ottoman readers would have also read it as proof of the dynasty's favor.

24 Abdullah Veliyüddin Bursevī, *Menākıb-ı Eşrefzāde: Eşrefoğlu Rūmī'nin Menkıbeleri*, ed. Abdullah Uçman (Istanbul), 2009, 22-26

25 Müneccimbaşı, 9. Cf. Yazıcızāde ʻAlī, *Tevārīh-i Āl-ı Selçuk*, ed. Abdullah Bakır (Istanbul, 2009), 923, 930. ʻAlī compiled this work for Murād II (r. 1421-44, 1446-51) from earlier

These dreams and anecdotes do not quite bring us to exceptionalism, however. God may have blessed the Ottomans, it is true, as seen in the line's success and the aid of His spiritual deputies. Yet this was not unprecedented; other dynasties had also enjoyed worldly power, spiritual blessings, or both. Rather, I argue that we can only speak of exceptionalism when the dynastic myth extends into claims of superiority—namely, that the Ottoman dynasty excelled other rulers and that their empire was qualitatively different from all others, past and present.[26]

This view is certainly visible by the mid-sixteenth century. Luṭfī Paşa (d. 1563), for example, the grand vizier of Süleymān I, claimed in his *Tevārīh-i Āl-ı 'Osmān* (*Annals of the House of 'Osmān*) that the Ottomans had surpassed all rulers but the Prophet and Rightly-Guided caliphs in their piety, bravery, support of holy law, and pursuit of ghazā; thus, in their merit. All others were guilty of faults, he writes. Some of the Umayyads rejected the caliph 'Alī, some of the Abbasids were schismatic, and the Ghaznavids, Khwarazm shāhs, and Salgarids revolted against legitimate masters. Luṭfī also writes that God sent the Ottomans to lead and renew Islam after the Mongol invasions. "God therefore blessed them with life, property, and realms accordingly," he says. "They are such a blessed dynasty that God shall grant them victory no matter how few men they take to oppose an enemy." For Luṭfī and other "exceptionalists," then, God did not merely favor the Ottomans. He also ensured their success and gave them a singular,

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sources on the Oğuz Turks and Seljuk dynasty. See also Elizabeth Zachariadou, "La chute de Constantinople en 1453 et la mythologie postérieure," in Ugo Marazzi, ed., *Turcica et Islamica: Studi in memoria di Aldo Galotta* (Naples, 2003), 1016-17; and Elias Kolovos, "The Saints in the Sultan's Dream," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005/6): 216.

26 See also Hagen and Menchinger, 100-01.

unprecedented place in history.[27]

Omens of the Last Hour: Eschatological Exceptionalism

Müneccimbaşı's last two omens of greatness bring us to eschatology, as both deal in some way with the end of time and the empire's relationship to it. Why would Ottomans be concerned with such things? It helps to take a wide view of the matter. Any number of events in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may have pushed subjects and members of the dynasty to think about the empire's place in historical terms, including Tīmūr's crushing defeat of Bāyezīd I, Meḥmed II's conquest of Istanbul, and Selīm I's great campaigns in the East. Indeed, the evolution of the "dynastic myth" into an exceptionalist narrative seems closely related to the placement of the Ottomans within larger cycles of sacral time and eschatology. It lies in the recognition of a telos. Following Karl Löwith, Gottfried Hagen argues that we can read a theology of history in our sources and suggests that the purpose of universal history for Ottomans could have been within time (in an end like world domination) or beyond time in eschatology. Other exceptionalisms, the American form included, have similar teleological and theological underpinnings.[28] At some

27 Luṭfī Paşa, *Tevārīh-i Āl-ı 'Osmān* (Istanbul, 1922), 4-7.

28 Gottfried Hagen, "Dreaming 'Osmāns: of History and Meaning," in *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Society*, eds. Özgen Felek and Alexander Knysh (Albany, 2012): 99-122. Hagen draws on Löwith's *Meaning in History: the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1949), esp. 1-19. Justin Litke traces the theological origins of American exceptionalism in *Twilight of the Republic: Empire and Exceptionalism in the American Political Tradition* (Lexington, 2013).

point, Ottomans came to associate the empire with such a telos—that is, with the culmination of worldly time and history.

It is clear that fairly early on some Ottomans took an eschatological view and suggested the dynasty would usher in the final days. Müneccimbaşı writes in one of his signs that the Andalusian mystic Ibn ʻArabī (d. 1240) used divination in a work called *al-Shajarat al-nuʻmāniyya fī al-dawlat al-ʻUthmāniyya* (*The Crimson Tree on the Ottoman Dynasty*) to predict the empire's rise seventy years before ʻOsmān's birth and its rule until the end of time.[29] This notoriously enigmatic text is incorrectly ascribed to Ibn ʻArabī; it was likely written in Egypt at some point after the Ottoman conquest. The work foretells the empire's rise and role in events to come, particularly in Egypt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, leading to the appearance of the Mahdī (the "guided one," often given as "messiah"). Its author and commentators link the Ottomans to the Quranic "righteous (*al-ṣāliḥūn*)," calling them "the most laudable rulers (*aḥmad al-mulūk*)" and "best of dynasties in the tenth century [and] unto the end of ages (*wa dawlatuhu aṣlāḥ al-duwal fī al-qarn al-ʻāshir hattā tatummu al-qurūn*)."[30] They are ciphered in various ways in the Quran. The work also predicts that Egypt will remain prosperous and in Ottoman hands until a great astrological event: the opposition of Mars and Saturn in the final degree of

29 Müneccimbaşı, 7-8.

30 See Pseudo-al-Qunawī's commentary on Pseudo-Ibn ʻArabī, *al-Shajarat al-nuʻmāniyya fī al-dawlat al-ʻUthmāniyya*, ed. Mamdūḥ al-Zūbī (Beirut, 2001), 58, 73, 84. The "righteous" refers to Quran 21:105-06 (Arberry translation): "For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, 'The earth shall be the inheritance of my righteous servants.' Surely in this is a Message delivered unto a people who serve."

Libra, which will signal the advent of the Mahdī and the last days. However, warns one commentator, "the Ottoman dynasty will not fall until after [these events] are complete!"[31]

While *al-Shajarat al-nu'māniyya* is wrongly credited to Ibn 'Arabī, belief in both his authorship of the tract and reported prognostications remained popular throughout the early modern era. The work also drew on eschatological traditions that the sheikh did in fact treat elsewhere. In his *Muḥāḍarāt al-abrār wa musāmarāt al-akhyār* (*Lectures of the Pious and Lucubrations of the Virtuous*), Ibn 'Arabī relates certain "terrifying events" that will occur at the end of time—namely, that a great king will come from the east. He will seize Egypt and Sudan and will defeat the so-called "Blond Peoples (*banū aṣfār*)" three times before another, the "Master of the West," arises to retake Egypt. This "Master of the West" will then fight and lose a final battle to a third king, a lord of great armies including Turks. Ottomans were very aware of these traditions, to be sure. They cited as well as read themselves into the narratives for, quite literally, hundreds of years.[32]

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31 Pseudo-al-Qunawī, 56-57, 133. See also Denis Gril, "L'énigme de la *Šağara al-nu'māniyya fī'l-dawla al-'uthmāniyya*, attribuée à Ibn 'Arabī," in *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople*, ed. Benjamin Lellouch and Stéphane Yérasimos (Paris, 1999), 133-51.

32 Ibn 'Arabī, *Kitāb muḥāḍarāt al-abrār wa musamarāt al-akhyār* (Beirut, 1968), 1: 341-43, 2: 32-33. For later references to these predictions, see 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī (d. 1565), *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (n.p., 1870), 1: 208; Ḳoca Rāgıb Paşa (d. 1763), *Tahkīk ve Tevfīk: Osmanlı-İran Diplomatik Münasebetlerinde Mezhep Tartışmaları*, ed. Ahmet İzgöer (Istanbul, 2003, 67; Aḥmed Vāṣıf (d. 1806), *Meḥāsinü'l-Āsār ve Ḥaḳāīḳü'l-Ahbār* (Istanbul, 1804), 1: 8; Ömer

The conquest of Istanbul in 1453 also likely fed eschatological expectation in the empire. Long-standing prophecies in both Islam and Byzantium tied the city's fall to the events of the Last Hour. Resembling in some ways the traditions in Ibn ʿArabī, these included the idea that a first conquest of the imperial city would lead to a second at the hands of the "Blond Peoples," usually associated with European Christians, and that the Mahdī would then descend to lead Muslim armies to a final, decisive reconquest. Contemporary Ottomans were aware of these prophecies, too. Authors repeated popular but uncanonical Prophetic sayings (*ḥadīth*) about the conquest. Meḥmed II's tutor, the Bayramī sheikh Aḳşemseddīn (d. 1459), told the sultan during the siege of the city that the Quranic phrase "*baldatun ṭayyibatun* ('a fair land')" was a divine sign of Ottoman conquest with the same numerical value as the year (AH 857). He also used divination to "discover" the tomb of Abū Ayyub al-Anṣārī, a companion of the Prophet, outside the city walls.[33]

Cābī (d. early 1800s), *Cābī Tārihi: Tārīh-i Sultān Selīm-i Sālis ve Mahmūd-ı Sānī*, ed. Mehmet Ali Beyan (Ankara, 2003), 1: 84; and Emīn Efendi (fl. late 1800s), *Osmanlı Hayatından Kesitler: Menākıb-ı Kethüdāzāde el-Hac Mehmed Ārif Efendi*, ed. Hasan Gürkan and Hür Mahmud Yücer (Istanbul, 2007), 408-09, 423.

33 See Kaya Şahin, "Constantinople and the End of Time: the Ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour," *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010): 317-54; and Stéphane Yerasimos, *Légendes d'empire: la fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris, 1990). Perhaps the most cited ḥadīth is not found in canonical collections and appears to have been fabricated during the Byzantine-Muslim wars in Syria: "Constantinople shall be conquered indeed; what a wonderful leader will that leader be; and what a wonderful

The *Dürr-i Meknūn* (*The Hidden Pearl*), a cosmography and work of apocalypse usually credited to one Aḥmed Bīcān, shares these sentiments but with a critical eye toward the Ottoman imperial project. Written around or slightly after 1453, *Dürr-i Meknūn* presents the fall of Istanbul as a portent of the Last Hour before the rise of the Dajjāl ("the Deceiver," a figure similar to the Christian Antichrist) and end of time. The work, among other things, claims that a series of minor dajjāls will follow the city's first fall but precede its final conquest:

> Why digress even further? For then the Jurhumī will appear, attacking from all sides and doing much evil. And from a people called Banū Qanṭūrā in Khiṭā (China), an infidel will emerge with the objective of conquering all these lands in the same way as the Banū Aṣfar captured Rūm. In a word, the world will be filled with oppression.

But the author assures readers that God, answering Muslim prayers, will then send a Mahdī to destroy the Blond Peoples, take Istanbul, and usher in the true Dajjāl, the descent of Jesus, and last days. While it is hard to read apocalypses as commentaries on historical events, he also seems to imply that Meḥmed II will be a key actor in the events.[34]

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army will that army be." (Şahin's translation)

34 Laban Kaptein, *Apocalypse and the Antichrist Dajjal in Islam: Ahmed Bijan's Eschatology Revisited* (Leiden, 2011), 39-45, 82-83, 153-72. I have altered his translation for consistency. Yerasimos argues in *Légendes* that this text derives from a ghāzī milieu in Edirne and, depicting Istanbul as cursed, voices an anti-imperial agenda. Kaptein does not think we can reliably read historical events and figures into the work. Cf. Şahin, 340 ff., who notes its prediction that the conquering sultan will be a young man named Maḥmūd or Muḥammad; Bīcān's *Müntehā* makes this connection explicit. A new dissertation at the University of

We find a less ambiguous historical reference in the chronicle of Oruç b. ʻĀdil (d. after 1503), written in the late fifteenth century reign of Bāyezid II. In a passage on the city of Istanbul, Oruç relates a prophecy based on a popular work of ḥadīth. Istanbul will fall again by sword before the Dajjāl comes, he writes. Judgment Day shall then ensue and the Mahdī, coming from the line of the Banū Isḥāq, will descend, attack, and take the city again simply by calling out the *takbīr* (i.e. Allāhu akbar). Oruç adds in summary, "they say that the one who will take [Istanbul] by sword is the sovereign of our age."[35]

Speculation about the Last Days—and the Ottoman role therein—grew with the approach of the Islamic millennium in AD 1592. As Cornell Fleischer and Hüseyin Yılmaz have done much to show, some Ottomans in the decades preceding the millennium proposed that the dynasty was directly or indirectly a fulcrum for the end of time,[36] and we can speak of a distinctly eschatological strain of exceptionalism in sixteenth-century figures like Luṭfī Paşa,

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Chicago calls into question Bīcān's long-assumed authorship of *Dürr-i Meknūn*: oral communication from Cornell Fleischer, April 2017.

35 Oruç b. ʻĀdil, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi*, ed. Necdet Öztürk (Istanbul, 2007), 112. He cites Muḥammad b. ʻAbdullah al-Khātib al-Tabrīzī's (d. 1340/41) ḥadīth commentary *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Mahdī al-Sharīf (Beirut, 2012), 4: 98-102, but esp. nrs. 5421, 5422, 5423.

36 Fleischer has published several definitive articles on the topic in the last twenty-five years. See his "Lawgiver as Messiah: the Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymān," in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris, 1992), 163-64; and esp. his recent "A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61 (2018): 18-90.

Senā'ī (fl. ca. 1540), Mevlānā 'İsā (fl. 1529-43), and 'Alī Dede Bosnevī (d. 1598). Luṭfī, for instance, argues in his *Tevārīh-i Āl-ı 'Osmān* that God sent the Ottoman line to renew the faith and that three sultans were "centennial renewers (*mujaddid*)," who had restored Islam after the Mongol invasions. To his mind, Selīm I (1512-20) was foremost: he was not only a mujaddid but also the "Messiah of the Last Age (*mahdī-i āhir-i zamān*)" foretold by prophecy.[37] Senā'ī similarly called Süleymān I in his *Süleymānnāme* (*Book of Solomon*) the "world emperor and Mahdī of the last age (*ṣāḥib-ḳırān ve mehdi-yi āhirü'l-zamān*)."[38] In the work *Cāmi'ü'l-Meknūnāt* (*The Compendium of Arcana*), meanwhile, Mevlānā 'İsā argues that Süleymān is the Last World Emperor, a ruler heralded by planetary conjunctions and omens who combines the roles of a millennial conqueror (*ṣāḥib-ḳırān*), hidden saint (*ḳuṭb*), and centennial renewer (*müceddid*). For Mevlānā 'İsā, Süleymān is either the Mahdī or his immediate predecessor and will unite the world under the true faith.[39]

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37 Luṭfī, *Tevārīh-i Āl-ı 'Osmān*, 7-13. See also Fleischer, "Lawgiver as Messiah," 163-64. Following the famous ḥadīth, "God will send to this community at the turn of every century someone to restore its religion," Luṭfī also calls 'Osmān I (ca. 1302-24) and Meḥmed I (r. 1413-21) mujaddids. This ḥadīth appears in Ibn Dawūd, *Sunan*, 3: 113. The classic discussion of the mujaddid is Jalāl al-Dīn al-Ṣuyūtī's (d. 1505) *al-Tanbi'a bi-man yab'athuhu Allāh 'alā ra's kull mi'a* (Mecca, 1990). Ella Landau-Tasseron discusses the pre-Ottoman tradition in "The Cyclical Reform: a Study of the Mujaddid Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 79-117.

38 Fleischer, "Lawgiver as Messiah," 169. See Binbaş on the title *ṣāḥib-ḳırān*, 251 ff.

39 Fleischer, "Lawgiver as Messiah," 164-68. See also Barbara Flemming, "*Der Ğāmi' ül-*

ʻAlī Dede Bosnevī still more clearly joined the Ottomans to eschatology and exceptionalism. A Halvetī dervish, ʻAlī wrote a book of "firsts and lasts" in Arabic called *Muḥāḍarāt al-awā'il wa musāmarāt al-awā'khir* (*Lectures of Firsts and Lucubrations of Lasts*) for Murād III (r. 1574-95), a sultan famous for his interest in the occult.[40] ʻAlī claims in this

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meknūnāt: eine Quelle Āli's aus der Zeit Sultan Süleymans," in *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des vorderen Orients. Festschrift für Berthold Spuler zum 70. Geburstag* (Leiden, 1981), 79-92; and Hagen, "Dreaming ʻOsmāns," 115-16. Yılmaz quotes Azfar Moin that scriptural ideas like Mahdī and mujaddid, mystical concepts like ḳuṭb, and royal titles like ṣāḥib-ḳırān, "all refer to human agents who could usher in and maintain the just religiopolitical order of a particular historica[l] era," 3. See his discussion of these terms and others, esp. 222-24, 266-85.

40 On ʻAlī Dede, see Bursalı Meḥmed Ṭāhir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, ed. A. Fikri Yavuz and İsmail Özen (Istanbul, n.d.) 1: 47-48. The title of this work appears to invoke the *Muḥāḍarāt* of Ibn ʻArabī. ʻAlī also wrote a treatise for Murād called *al-Risālat al-intiṣāriyya* (*The Victorious Epistle*), which Bursalı Meḥmed owned in manuscript and calls "a useful and concise Arabic treatise that gathers together the reports of important people and scholars concerning the Ottoman line's virtues and the continuation of its power." See Yılmaz (272-76, 286) on ʻAlī Dede and this treatise, also called *al-Intiṣār li-qidwat al-akhyār* (*The Book of Victory for the Paragon of the Virtuous*), which he describes as an account of a 1583 campaign but cast as the reenactment of Alexander's world conquest, and "a verification of prophecies regarding the Ottoman dynasty and a statement of its unique attributes." A copy survives at the Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Paşa Library in Istanbul (MS 1381, fols. 185a-99b)

work that God had not aided any dynasty after the Abbasids like the Ottomans. "That incomparable dynasty and well-directed, divinely-supported sultanate," he says, "the Ottoman dynasty, has excelled all other dynasties and their kings, hence their zeal to struggle with the enemies of God and with heretics and innovators. They are under God's protection from the disorders that have affected past dynasties ruling under the Abbasids."

> How many dynasties have risen and fallen while God sustains this dynasty? God has specially distinguished it with numerous traits, strong statesmen, and well-directed magnates, for they struggle for the faith, revive the Sunna, crush religious innovators, spread their rule to followers of the law, and plant their standards on the straight path. God for this reason protects them from those seditions that have usually afflicted past sultans among the Turks, Seljuks, Daylamids, and Fatimids.[41]

ʻAlī also argues that the Ottomans will be last in time. They are the last of eight dynasties to emerge under the Abbasid caliphate, the others being the Saffarids, Samanids, Ghaznavids, Daylamids, Seljuks, Khwarazm shāhs, and Mongols. "I have heard from some holy men," he writes, via a work called *al-Jafr al-jāmiʻ* (*The Comprehensive Prognostication*), "that their line will last till the time of the Mahdī, to whom they will surrender the caliphate and whose partisans and helpers they will be." This report was current in the reign of Süleymān I.[42]

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41 ʻAlī Dede Bosnevī (also called ʻAlā al-Dīn ʻAlī Dede al-Sigetwārī), *Muḥāḍarāt al-awā'il wa musāmarāt al-awā'khir* (Cairo, 2003), 208, 381-82.

42 Ibid, 383. Süleymān was told that the Mahdī would come during his reign, ʻAlī says, and was asked if he would step aside without a fight. Süleymān evidently said no, citing his human weakness and love of rulership. The title *al-Jafr al-jāmiʻ* presumably refers to the work

It is of interest here, too, that ʻAlī links the Ottomans to the Banū Qanṭūrā—the supposed descendants of the Prophet Abraham's concubine Qanṭūrā (Keturah), who were long associated in Islamic eschatology with Turks and as harbingers, usually evil, of the Last Days. The Qanṭūrā appear in early sources. In Ibn Hishām's (d. 833) *Sīrat Rasūl Allah* (*Vita of the Prophet of God*), we find them after the Prophet Ismāʻīl's death as a clan fighting the Banū Jurhum in Mecca, from which they were supposedly expelled to Turkestan.[43] According to the *Sunan* (*Traditions*) of Abū Dawūd (d. 889), moreover, a canonical work of ḥadīth, the Prophet predicted that the Banū Qanṭūrā would return at the end of time to conquer the great city of Basra:

> The Banū Qanṭūrā will come at the end of time with broad faces and small eyes and alight on the riverbank. And the city's people will separate into three groups: one group will take their cattle into the desert and perish; one group will seek security for themselves and perish; but one group will put their children behind their backs and fight the invaders, and they will be the martyrs.[44]

The author of *Dürr-i Meknūn* invoked the Banū Qanṭūrā in this same ominous guise.

Miftāḥ al-jafr al-jāmiʻ (*The Key to Comprehensive Prognostication*) by ʻAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bistāmī (d. 1454). The most famous *al-Jafr al-jāmiʻ* is credited apocryphally to ʻAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, purported founder of "the science of letters (*ʻilm al-ḥurūf*)."

43 A. Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad: a Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allah* (Oxford, 1967), 44-46. See also Bosnevī, 71, 382.

44 Abū Dawūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan* (Beirut, 1991), 3: 117. Cf. Edwin E. Calverley and James Pollock, ed. and trans., *Nature, Man, and God in Medieval Islam: ʻAbd Allah Baydawi's Tawaliʻ al-Anwar min Mataliʻ al-Anzar* (Leiden, 2002), 1: 989 f.

Interestingly, though, ʻAlī Dede associates them with the dynasty in his work and as supporters rather than opponents of the Mahdī, quoting a different ḥadīth: "The last ones to rule my community will be the Banū Qanṭūrā (*ākhir mā yamluku amr ummatī Banū Qanṭūrā*)."[45]

Such predictions surely appealed to ʻAlī Dede's patron, Murād III, who collected own his dreams in a work called *Kitābü'l-Menāmāt* (*The Book of Dreams*). Murād's visions suggest that he saw himself as a messianic figure, the last of the dynasty that would usher in the final days. He was a hidden saint who received divine revelation, even reporting a voice that said, "There is no god but God and you are His messenger!"[46] Murād also claimed to be a centennial renewer and savior who would reunite the Sunnis and Shiites before the end of time. In the work, Murād relates one dream that joined these pretensions to his pedigree as twelfth sultan of the Ottoman line, identifying him implicitly with the twelfth imām and thus the Mahdī in Shiite tradition. "I was given a letter," he says.

> It was written, "The Ottoman caliphs are supposed to be twelve. There have been eleven so far. The twelfth is 'Hāzā Murādu'l-Murād.' That is, it is you." It was written: "May God grant goodness to you."[47]

Empire to the End of the Age: "Renewal-Focused" Exceptionalism

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45 Bosnevī, 382.

46 Özgen Felek, "(Re)creating Image and Identity: Dreams and Visions as a Means of Murād III's Self-Fashioning," in *Dreams and Visions*, 261-62. For the text, see *Kitābü'l-Menāmāt: Sultan III. Murad'ın Rüya Mektupları*, ed. Özgen Felek (Istanbul, 2012), 85.

47 Felek's translation, 264. Text in *Kitābü'l-Menāmāt*, 178.

Not everyone went so far as Murād or ʻAlī Dede. Ottoman élites could still insist on the dynasty's special status and rule until the end of time without, necessarily, committing to the *imminent* end of time. Müneccimbaşı's last sign shows us one such alternative by stressing the line's exceptionalism and longevity through its lineage, telling of a holy man among the Oğuz Turks. This Ḳorḳut Ata or Dede Ḳorḳut related the "testament" of the legendary Oğuz Khan to his eldest son Ḳayı Khan, to whom he bequeathed his rule. According to Müneccimbaşı, Oğuz Khan willed that rule should remain in the line of Ḳayı Khan "until the end of time (*ilā ākhir al-dawarān*)."[48] The chronicler Rūḥī (d. 1522) also harmonizes this Turkic lineage with another exceptional, this time Quranic, pedigree. The Ottomans, he implies, descend from the Banū Isḥāq through the Prophet Isḥāq (Isaac)'s elder son ʻAyṣ (Esau), who was actually Ḳayı Khan. Rūḥī says that ʻAyṣ gave his younger brother Yaʻqūb (Jacob) control of the Arabian peninsula and then migrated to Turkestan, where his offspring ruled for many generations.[49] Until the end of time, the story goes, all great rulers of the world shall descend from ʻAyṣ and all prophets from Yaʻqūb. As Celālzāde Ṣāliḥ Çelebi (d. 1565) puts it, the Prophet ʻAyṣ' house is "the mine of rulers; that is, all the rulers on earth who come into the world till Judgment Day are from his line."[50]

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48 Müneccimbaşı, 9.

49 Yaşar Yücel and Halil Cengiz, eds., *Rūhī Tārīhi* (Ankara, 1992), 369-75. See also al-Bayātī, 1: 395.

50 Celālzāde Ṣāliḥ Çelebi, *Hadīkatü's-Selātīn: İnceleme-Metin*, ed. H. İbrahim Delice and Hasan Yüksel (Ankara, 2013), 15-16. See also Muṣṭafā ʻĀlī, *Künhü'l-Ahbār* (Istanbul, 1861), 5: 18-19.

Nor did all Ottomans believe that the end was nigh. Muṣṭafā Selānīkī (d. 1600?) writes in his chronicle that the millennium came and went without any major upheavals, in spite of popular anxiety to the contrary.[51] Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī (d. 1600), Selānīkī's contemporary, in at least one instance rejected the imminent end of the world, while still others predicted that the empire would last a further 2,000 years or seventy sultans, respectively.[52] Kātib Çelebi (d. 1657) also famously mocked doomsayers in the preface to his *Fezleke-i Tevārīh* (*Outline of History*), showing that AH 1000 was a year like any other in the world's calendars. "Some dimwits," he says, "supposed that Judgment Day would come before the millennium or that, if passed, it should not exceed the thirty years' disparity in the lunar reckoning."

> They in this way asserted certain false or even fraudulent premises, such as the revolution of the moon being complete or the ḥadīth that states, 'One thousand years shall not tarry on the Prophet's tomb.' And a great many people were taken in, even though this judgment went against the principles of the law and reason. They wrote it in their books

51 Muṣṭafā Selānīkī, *Tārih-i Selānīkī*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Istanbul, 1989), 1: 257, 431.

52 On ʿĀlī, see Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: the Historian Mustafa Āli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, 1986), 133 ff. Cf. Kaptein, 52-54, who is critical of Fleischer. The Bayramī sheikh İlyās b. ʿİsā wrote *Rumūzü'l-Künūz*, ed. Ayhan Özgül (Masters' thesis, Kırıkkale University, 2004), in 1557 to predict the future of the dynasty and world up to AH 3000. The mid-seventeenth century *Papasnāme* also refutes the dynasty's imminent end, predicting the reign of seventy [!] more sultans before Judgment Day. On the latter, see Tijana Kristć, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA, 2011), 116-18.

and it was clearly a lie. But God knows best![53]

Muṣṭafā Nā'īmā (d. 1716) shared this sentiment and, in fact, added Kātib Çelebi's passage verbatim to his own eighteenth-century chronicle.[54]

Following the millennium, the eschatological motifs discussed above became neutered. In fact, there are few traces at all of eschatological exceptionalism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources. It is striking that Müneccimbaşı, in making his sweeping statements on Ottoman greatness, makes no indication that he expects an imminent end to time on earth. Instead, Ottoman élites during this period appear to have turned their attention inward to concerns over the empire's stability, durability, decline, and prospective renewal. A "decline-" or "renewal-focused" strand of exceptionalism seems to have supplanted the old. However, this development did not mean that the dynasty lost any of its supposed special status or that Ottomans no longer felt the empire would last until the end of time. It instead meant a shift to the future, an indeterminate delay.

Consider the example of Aḥmed Vāṣıf (d. 1806), a court chronicler who wrote at the turn of the nineteenth century. Vāṣıf cites numerous traditions about the fortunes of the Ottoman line in his work *Meḥāsinü'l-Āsār ve Ḥaḳāiḳü'l-Ahbār* (*The Charms and Truths of Relics and Annals*). "Muslim books are replete with allusions to such affairs," he writes.[55] Vāṣıf also refers to both

53 Kātib Çelebi, *Fezleke-i Tevārīh* (Istanbul, 1869), 1: 2.

54 Muṣṭafā Nā'īmā, *Tārih-i Nā'īmā*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara, 2007), 1: 49.

55 Vāṣıf, *Meḥāsinü'l-Āsār ve Ḥaḳāiḳü'l-Ahbār* (Istanbul, 1804), 1: 8. Here he also notes a passage found in the writings of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥa al-Hāshīmī (d. 760) and the "timekeeper (*muwaqqit*)" al-Miṣrī (?): "Muḥammad b. 'Abdullah will conquer al-Ghaydā (yaftuḥu al-

ʻAlī Dede Bosnevī and Ibn ʻArabī to argue that the Ottomans descend from the Banū Qanṭūrā, who, he says, migrated to Iran after their expulsion from Mecca. For Vāṣıf, however, this genealogy has none of its earlier eschatological weight. "It is the most reliable report that the founder of the Ottomans was from that illustrious tribe," he says.

> Hence there is no doubt that [the Ottomans] have been blessed with rule of the community according to the sound ḥadīth, "The last ones to rule my community will be the Banū Qanṭūrā." Their sovereignty's radiant moon will be safe from setting or eclipse and remain the ornament of the apogee till the brink of Judgment Day.[56]

For Vāṣıf, the Ottomans will not immediately usher in the Last Hour. Their pedigree is a sign that the dynasty will last *until* the end of time, rather than a sign that it *is* the end of time.

The fizzling of eschatological expectations may also be seen in the idea of an "eternal" empire that increasingly appears after 1592. Sources from the seventeenth century onward refer often to the Ottoman line as "eternal (*devlet-i ebed-peyvend*)," "everlasting (*devlet-i ebed-müddet*)," and other variants. While I have traced this usage back to the fifteenth century, early examples refer to the ruler's personal fortune (*devlet*) and are couched as prayers or invocations,

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Ghaydā Muḥammad b. ʻAbdullah)." Vāṣıf claims the phrase refers to the Grand Vizier Muḥsinzāde Meḥmed b. ʻAbdullah (d. 1774), who put down a rebellion in the Morea (parsed as "al-Ghaydā") during the 1768-74 Russian-Ottoman war.

56 Vāṣıf (1804), 1: 8-9. Vāṣıf cites ʻAlī Dede's *al-Risālat al-intiṣāriyya* and Ibn ʻArabī's *Muḥāḍarāt al-abrār* as his sources. In fact, close parallels in phrasing suggest that his actual source was al-Karmī (cf. *Qalā'id*, fols. 20b-21a).

as in a fifteenth-century treaty and two sixteenth-century chronicles.[57] However, a cursory examination hints that the phrase shifted in key ways later on. First, we begin to see it as a descriptor and adjectival phrase. Second, and importantly, *devlet* takes on a more abstract and depersonalized meaning than previously, no longer merely denoting the ruler's "fortune" but the "dynasty" or even "empire" or "state." This phraseology is well-established in eighteenth-century sources ranging from chronicles and embassy reports to administrative documents.[58] It is

57 See Alaadin Aköz, "Karamanoğlu II. İbrahim Beyin Osmanlı Sultan II. Murad'a Vermiş Olduğu Ahidnāme," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 24/38 (2005): 83: "Leylen ve nehāren subhan ve mesā'en setren ve cehren be-du'ā-yı devām-ı devlet-i ebed-peyvend." See also Rūḥī, 370-71: "abbadahum Allahu bi'l-salṭanatihi ilā yawm al-qiyām." Raḥīmīzāde Ḥarīmī Çelebi, *Kitāb-ı Gencīne-i Fetḥ-i Gence* (Istanbul, 2010), 12: "Medḥ u du'ā-yı devlet-i ebed-peyvend-i husrev-i cihān khallada khilāfatuhu ilā yawm al-mīzān."

58 See, for example, İbrahim Müteferrika in *Tārih-i Nā'īmā*, 1897: "Āl-ı 'Osmān'ın eyyām-ı devlet-i dā'imü'l-ḳarārlarında ve hengām-ı salṭanat-ı ebediyyü'l-istimrārlarında. . ."; Meḥmed Ṣubḥī, *Subhī Tarihi*, ed. Mesut Aydıner (Istanbul, 2007), 277 n. 35: "hāfız-ı serhadd-ı sugūr-ı Devlet-i ebed-kıyām. . .Devlet-i 'Aliyye-i dā'imü'l-karār tarafından. . ."; Necīb, *Tārih-i Sulṭān Selīm-i Sālis* (Istanbul, 1863), 5: "Devlet-i 'Aliyye-i ebediyyetü'l-devāmın bir ḳaç ṣınıfdan 'ibaret olan ṭavā'if. . ." See also Yirmisekiz Meḥmed Çelebi, *Sefāretnāme-i Meḥmed Efendi* (Istanbul, 1866), 2: "Bu ḥaḳīr-i pür-taḳṣīr Devlet-i 'Aliyye-i ebed-peyvend cānibinden Frānsa pādişāhına elçi ta'yin olunmağla"; and a commercial document cited in Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1999), 111 n. 75: "Devlet-i 'Aliyye-i

possible that the notion of an "eternal empire" grew up in the wake of the millennium and shows a shift in how some Ottomans saw the empire—that is, that it would last until the end of time, whenever such an event might occur, rather than playing an immediate role in the eschaton. Notably, this idea parallels two other trends: the formation of an abstract concept of "state (*devlet*)" in seventeenth-century Ottoman thought, and the gradual desacralization of the person of the monarch.[59]

Instead of looking upward or forward to the future, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources tend to look inward to the realm's domestic situation. Ottoman élites from the late sixteenth century on often read events in the surrounding world like military defeat, rebellion, and fiscal turmoil as signs of the realm's growing disorder; exceptionalism as an element of Ottoman political and historical thought existed during this time alongside reformist discourse and anxiety that the empire was, in some way, in "decline." Cemal Kafadar once suggested that

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ebed-peyvend ile França Devleti beyninde cereyān müvālāt..."

59 See Marinos Sariyannis on *devlet* as a concept in "Ruler and State, State and Society in Ottoman Thought," *Turkish Historical Review* 4 (2013): 92-126. Baki Tezcan makes a similar argument, esp. in *The Second Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 2010). Mu'allim Nācī defined "eternal (*ebed*)" in the nineteenth-century as "time-periods with no accounted end in the future, i.e. the eternal dynasty (*devlet-i ebed-müddet*)": *Lugat-ı Nācī* (Istanbul, 1987), 18. On the desacralization of the sultan, see Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms: Toward a Conceptual History of Ottoman Political Notions," *Turcica* 47 (2016): 33-72; and Nicholas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le sérail ébranlé: essai sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans, XIVe-XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2003).

anxiety with decline fueled early modern Ottoman reform literature in a dialectical relationship.[60] It seems to me that exceptionalism may have acted as a key part of this motor, as a countervailing force to declinism that drove intellectual debate much in the same way that a piston powers an engine. The tension between the two ideas is undeniable. Whereas exceptionalism served to insulate the empire from usual historical and political patterns, decline hinted at normality, vulnerability, and even the risk of dynastic death. The two are by no means incompatible, though. To an extent, Ottoman fears of decline grew out of their sense of exceptionalism. To an extent, and in circular fashion, exceptionalism could provide answers and assuage those same fears. Indeed, the two ideas may have created a productive tension in élites, instilling at once reassurance, conviction, and vigilance and spurring intellectual debate.

Perhaps the main characteristic of Ottoman political thought in this era was the search for renewal, either through reform efforts or charismatic individuals. While a close study reveals several distinct concepts of reform in our sources, reflected in terms like "amelioration (*ıṣlāḥ*)" and "renewal (*tecdīd*)," these concepts share a central premise: the perceived dissolution of the divinely-ordained moral, political, and social order that Ottomans felt upheld their society,

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60 Kafadar points out that Ottoman élites never suffered "a debilitating *crise de conscience*" nor questioned the "moral fiber" of their enterprise: "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1997-98): 43. See also Kafadar, "The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Süleymānic Era," in *Süleymān the Second and His Time*, eds. Kafadar and Halil İnalcık (Istanbul, 1993), 37-48; and Doug Howard, "Ottoman Historiography and the Literature of 'Decline' of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian History* 22 (1988): 52-77.

usually called the "order of the world (*niẓām-ı ʿālem*)."[61] The goal of Ottoman reform was not to create new or better institutions. Rather, it aimed to restore world order and, with it, the empire's past glories. We have seen how some sixteenth-century authors like Luṭfī Paşa and ʿAlī Dede Bosnevī called different rulers "centennial renewers." This term resurfaced in the eighteenth-century search for political saviors. Supporters proclaimed Selīm III (d. 1807), Maḥmūd II (d. 1839), and even the Grand Vizier Halīl Ḥamīd Paşa (d. 1785) as mujaddids, for example. Some even used the title Mahdī, though by this time it had lost its apocalyptic aura.[62] If dimmed eschatological expectations after the millennium left élites to fret about the empire's trajectory in the here-and-now, then, it was always with the hope of renewal.

Sources express these concerns in different ways. Some thinkers and statesmen, such as the sixteenth-century poet and chronicler Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī, focused on the empire's laws and institutions and their relationship to imperial decline. ʿĀlī was both a declinist and exceptionalist. He claims in one work that the Ottomans had excelled Alexander, Solomon, Tīmūr, and all other dynasties in history, and that they are therefore insulated from foreign and domestic trouble as

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61 Alp Eren Topal, "From Decline to Progress: Ottoman Concepts of Reform, 1600-1876," (Ph.D. diss., Bilkent University, 2017), esp. 20-100. See also Gottfried Hagen, "Legitimacy and World Order," in *Legitimizing the Order: the Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, eds. Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden, 2005), 55-83.

62 Topal, 82-86. See also Menchinger, *First of the Modern Ottomans*, 86; and Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya in the Ottoman Lands in the Early 19th Century," *Die Welt des Islams* 22 (1982): 1-36.

others are not.[63] Yet ʿĀlī, at times for self-serving reasons, also stressed the empire's ancient law (*ḳānūn-ı ḳadīm*) as the key to its success, deviation from which led to decline. In the work *Fuṣūl-ı Ḥall u Aḳd* (*The Seasons of Sovereignty*), he writes that Meḥmed II once asked his Grand Vizier Maḥmūd Paşa if, following his code of law, the empire might ever decline. Maḥmūd replied that only God's realm did not decline. However, he noted two ways that the Ottoman realm could weaken—if a sultan ceased to keep the law (and thus ceased to be just) or if outsiders infiltrated the army—and this decline had already begun under Murād III, ʿĀlī writes.[64]

The anonymous seventeenth-century reform treatise *Kitāb-ı Müsteṭāb* (*The Approved Book*) contains somewhat similar views. Like ʿĀlī, its author attributes Ottoman greatness to justice and strict adherence to the law and dates the empire's decline to the reign of Murād III. The realm has now fallen into disorder, he writes, the treasury bankrupt and the army weakened. Apart from a number of reform proposals, the author also adds an anecdote very like ʿĀlī's but with Selīm I and Grand Vizier Pīrī Paşa in place of Meḥmed II and Maḥmūd Paşa. His exact

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63 Andreas Tietze, ed. and trans., *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī's Counsel for Sultans of 1581* (Vienna, 1979), 1: 37-39. Jan Schmidt argues (contra Fleischer, *Bureaucrat*, 277 ff.) that ʿĀlī did not see the realm as one of several competing regional states but as a universal (and thus singular) empire: *Pure Water for Thirsty Muslims: a Study of Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī of Gallipoli's Künhü'l-Ahbār* (Leiden, 1991), 198.

64 Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī, *Fusūl-ı Hall ü Akd ve Usūl-ı Harc u Nakd: İslam Devletler Tarihi, 622-1599*, ed. Mustafa Demir (Istanbul, 2006), 141-43. See Fleischer, *Bureaucrat*, 224 ff., for ʿĀlī's obsession with ḳānūn. Topal (38) defines ḳānūn-ı ḳadīm as "a concept which refers to and idealizes the administrative practices of the bygone sultans. . ."

causes for Ottoman decline differ, too, suggesting the flexibility of ḳānūn as a concept.[65] Encouraged by a friend, the polymath and historian Hezārfen Ḥüseyin (d. 1691) for his part wrote *Telhīṣü'l-Beyān fī Ḳavānīn-i Āl-ı 'Osmān* (*Précis on the Laws of the House of 'Osmān*) on the subject of this entire legal and administrative edifice. "Your efforts on the law and customs of past kingdoms and their rule is perfect in all ways," said his colleague,

> But as Ottoman law is based on holy law as well as reason, sagacity, and experience, everyone knows that it is superior to other kingly laws and that, in many respects, their rule towers over contemporary kings in power and stability.[66]

For Hezārfen, the empire's institutions were a critical part of its special status as well as of its past and future success. They therefore deserved to be recorded in detail.

For others, one of the realm's most outstanding traits was its recuperative ability. We have seen how Muṣṭafā 'Ālī and 'Alī Dede, among others, declared that the dynasty was immune to normal political disorders. Ḳoçi Bey (fl. 1630s), author of a classic seventeenth-century reform tract, went so far as to say that the empire could recover from astounding reverses:

> This state is such a Sublime State that, once it is put to rights, it has by God's grace absolutely nothing to fear. It is such a state that if the armies of Islam, taking refuge in God, were defeated ten times in battle, by God's grace neither the Sublime State nor the

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65 Yaşar Yücel, ed., *Osmanlı Devlet Düzenine Ait Metinler I.: Kitāb-ı Müstetāb* (Ankara, 1974), 2, 30-31. His stated reasons for decline are incompetent Grand Viziers, bribery and unqualified officials, and "petticoat" governance.

66 Hezārfen, *Telhīsü'l-Beyān fī Kavānīn-i Āl-ı Osmān*, ed. Sevim İlgürel (Ankara, 1998), 37-38, 45.

faith would suffer any harm whatsoever.[67]

Ḳoçi Bey claims that there had been no line as pure or successful as the Ottomans since the Rightly-Guided caliphs. This power even excited the envy of the neighboring Safavid Shāh ʻAbbās, he says, who demanded an explanation for it from his courtiers.[68]

Aḥmed Vāṣıf, who lived through the late eighteenth-century Ottoman-Russian wars, when the empire teetered on collapse, also continued to voice an unwavering faith in the empire. Vāṣıf calls the Ottomans "after the Rightly-Guided caliphs, the best and most honorable sovereigns to cast a shade of justice and equity on the face of the earth." He believed they had a "pure lineage" through the Banū Qanṭūrā and Noah; they were not "of dubious origin like the Buyid dynasty, the Fatimids, and others." These traits allowed the Ottomans to build their realm, he says, and insulated them from risks faced by normal empires, as when they survived Tīmūr's invasion—a fate to which even the Abbasids succumbed.[69] It is possible that for Vāṣıf, as for

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67 Ḳoçi Bey, *Koçi Bey Risalesi* (Istanbul, 1939), 66.

68 Ḳoçi Bey, 33, 37. I have found other examples of authors voicing exceptionalism by comparing the Ottomans favorably to rival dynasties. For instance, Ḳoca Rāgıb Paşa relates in *Tahkīk ve Tevfīk* (66-68), an account of peace talks between the Ottomans and Iranians in 1736, how, during one meeting, the Ottoman representatives declared their realm to be entirely superior to Iran. "Both right and the caliph of God are on the Sublime State's side. . ." they said. "Let us brief you on the Sublime State's situation and the circumstances of the Iranian side, following the scripture, 'And remind, for indeed the reminder benefits the believers.'" The delegates then gave several alleged signs of Ottoman superiority.

69 Vāṣıf (1804), 1: 8-9.

Ḳoçi Bey a century and a half before, such sentiments served as a reassurance during times of pronounced political or military crisis. “It is clear to those who study history,” Vāṣıf states in another work, “that while our sovereigns are subject to some of the civil turmoil that often affects Islamic dynasties, they have always managed to right the situation directly and have become even more powerful and mighty than before.”[70]

Whatever the case, we can see an important shift in perceptions already by the mid-seventeenth century. Hoca Sādeddīn (d. 1599) spoke of the dynasty’s “unsetting sun” in his well-read work.[71] The chronicler Muṣṭafā Ṣāfī (d. 1616) writes in his *Zübdetü’l-Tevārīh* (*Quintessence of Histories*) that the Ottomans are the most just kings and best of ghāzīs since the Rightly-Guided caliphs, and that they will fight the infidel “until the end of time (*ilā ḳıyāmı’s-sā‘ati ve sā‘ati’l-ḳıyām*).”[72] One final telling piece of evidence comes from the chronicler Meḥmed Hemdemī Ṣolāḳzāde (d. 1658), author of a popular dynastic history. Ṣolāḳzāde rehashes much of the traditional material on the early Ottomans, including two of the dream narratives. In both cases, however, when the divine voice addresses Erṭuğrul and when Edebālī interprets ‘Osmān’s dream, Ṣolāḳzāde adds the same crucial phrase: *ilā inḳırāżi’l-deverān*. The line of Erṭuğrul and ‘Osmān will rule, he says, leaving no room for doubt, “till the end of the age.”[73]

Conclusion

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70 Idem, *Mehāsinü’l-Āsār ve Hakāikü’l-Ahbār*, ed. Mücteba İlgürel (Istanbul, 1994), 5

71 Hoca Sādeddīn, *Tācü’l-Tevārih* (Istanbul, 1863), 1: 8.

72 Muṣṭafā Ṣāfī, *Zübdetü’l-Tevārīh*, ed. İbrahim Çuhadar (Ankara, 2003), 1: 3.

73 Ṣolāḳzāde, *Tārih-i Ṣolāḳzāde* (Istanbul, 1880), 7-8.

Taking dreams and omens in Müneccimbaşı and elsewhere as an entry point, I have tried to define "exceptionalism" as a dominant narrative in Ottoman thought and to identify two of its major strains: an "eschatological" variety leading up to the Islamic millennium, and a "renewal-focused" strand in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Authors like ʿAlī Dede Bosnevī read these signs as a signal that the end times were at hand; for them, the dynasty had a pivotal and immediate role to play in those events. For later writers, however, for those like Ṣolāḳzāde, Müneccimbaşı, and Ahmed Vāṣıf, Ottoman rule would continue to be blessed by God and would continue into the indefinite future. In their hands, the same signs simply meant that the dynasty would last *until* the end of time, whenever that should occur, rather than signal that it *was* the end of time. Their concern instead shifted inward to what they saw as the realm's unsettled state and its renewal.

Of course, this effort just scratches the surface. We are dealing with a sprawling topic, one that was probably not always consciously expressed by Ottoman élites and filtered beyond the realm of ideas into areas like statecraft, political reform, war, and other decision-making. I have also limited myself to only a few of its many possible varieties. Still, it is clear that exceptionalism was a dominant discourse (or, following Mansour, a "dominant narrative") in the early modern empire's political and historical thought. We know that not all Ottomans embraced exceptionalism; at times vocal discontent surfaced. On occasion, we even find figures who went so far as to sharply criticize the dynasty, such as the mystic Niyāzī-i Mıṣrī (d. 1694) or the religious crank Fażlızāde ʿAlī (fl. 1740). Such protests seem to have been quite rare, however.[74]

74 Feridun Emecen discusses a number of rumored plots to replace the dynasty with rivals like the Khans of Crimea or powerful families like the Köprülüs: "Osmanlı Hanedanına Alternatif

More commonly, dissenters hedged or implicitly cast doubt. For Kātib Çelebi, for example, misgivings arose from the serious study of history and society, from seeking out patterns, and from models that stressed the empire's comparability rather than its uniqueness, leading him to apply an Ibn Khaldūnian model to history.[75] The Ibn Khaldūnian view enjoyed popularity in some eighteenth-century circles and implied, through its merciless logic, that the Ottoman dynasty might someday end. Yet even the doubters and dissenters, the most skeptical figures like Kātib Çelebi, all hedged. They would not commit to the idea publicly but continued to claim that it was possible to restore the empire, that the Ottoman dynasty was exempt. "No society must necessarily reach the end of its age of decline," Kātib Çelebi writes.[76] In truth, it is hard to tell if

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Arayışlar," in *Osmanlı Klasik Çağında Hanedan, Devlet ve Toplum* (Istanbul, 2011), 37-60. See also Marlene Kurz, *Ways to Heaven, Gates to Hell: Fażlızāde 'Alī's Struggle with the Diversity of Ottoman Islam* (Bonn, 2011), esp. 18-55. These instances of discontent appear to have been neither common nor popular. They also raise questions about the very nature of the Ottoman polity. Was the empire "embodied" in the dynasty or did it exist, so to speak, independently of the line? Could the Ottoman Empire have existed without the House of 'Osmān?

75 Esp. Kātib Çelebi, *Düstūrü'l-'Amel li-Iṣlāḥi'l-Halel*, as appendix to 'Ayn 'Alī, *Ḳavānīn-i Āl-ı 'Osmān der Hülāṣa-ı Meżāmīn-i Defter-i Divān* (Istanbul, 1863), 120-40.

76 Kātib Çelebi, *Taḳvīmü'l-Tevārīh*, University of Michigan, Isl. Ms. nr. 393, fols. 209-11. Like Kātib Çelebi, Nā'īmā, Aḥmed Resmī (d. 1783), and Dürrī Meḥmed (d. 1792) all adopted Ibn Khaldūnian models of history but resisted the conclusion that the empire would end. Some figures even suggested that proper reform might somehow "reset" the empire's place in the

Ottomans could imagine the end of the empire at all. They certainly were not free to say so openly.

A preliminary study such as this one often raises more questions than it can answer. How far did exceptionalist thinking pervade the Ottoman Empire's organization, politics, and decision-making? How far did it shape individual or collective thought and action? Finally, when did exceptionalism cease to move hearts and minds? The notion proved very durable, as we have seen, outlasting the hopes of the millennium, withstanding early modern fears of decline, and surviving the catastrophes of the late eighteenth century. To all appearances, Ottomans upheld its tenets into the nineteenth century. Did exceptionalism eventually prove pathological, then—that is, did it prevent Ottoman élites from fully appreciating and confronting the problems of the late empire? I do not wish to overstate the importance of exceptionalism in Ottoman worldviews. While it may have conditioned the empire's diplomacy, views on war and reform, and approach to foreign powers, exceptionalism was by no means the only factor. I only wish to impress that these ideas were not just rhetorical window dressing or empty panegyric. Ottomans drew meaning from them for centuries, used them to interpret the realm and its place in time and history, and looked to them to understand their own duties as subjects and servitors of the dynasty. Exceptionalism was an intellectual lodestar. Like so much else in Ottoman cultural and intellectual history, precisely how it wove together myth and prophecy, how it joined justification to action, and how it merged the political with the theological remain to be discovered.

Ibn Khaldūnian cycle. For a recent treatment of the topic, see Marinos Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ibn Khaldunism Revisited: the Pre-Tanzimat Reception of the *Muqaddima*, from Kınālızāde to Ṣānīzāde" (unpublished paper).